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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 001294

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: SAGGING CONSERVATIVES SEEK TO RALLY FORCES; SOCIAL  
DEMOCRATS OPTIMISTIC IN STYRIA

REF: VIENNA 1145 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Econ/Pol Counselor Dean Yap. Reason: 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary. Now trailing the Social Democrats (SPO) in the polls, conservative OVP leadership and cadres rallied Sept. 5 in Austria's second city, Graz, to launch formally the final phase of the election campaign. OVP leader Wilhelm Molterer told the faithful the party had to work harder and emphasized the reliability-gap between the OVP's record and the SPO's promises. He warned that, if the party does not win, it faces years in opposition. Though Molterer was more animated than usual, conversations before the rally with party officials indicated little enthusiasm among party supporters for fighting the election. In contrast, an SPO official predicted the party would poll as well as it had in 2006 (34%), well ahead of current polls. End Summary.

The Conservatives: "The Principle of Hope"

¶2. (C) In a meeting with Emboff, state OVP party manager Bernhard Rinner described an apathetic party structure in Styria that made him personally pessimistic about the election outcome. In contacts with the party's many mayors in the state, he had frequently heard "I don't want to have anything to do with this election." Much of this apathy appears due to personal dislike of party leader Molterer, whose cool, cerebral, and distant style (which Molterer himself acknowledged in his speech later that day) is a turn-off in Austria's chummy political culture. Moreover, Molterer appears dull in contrast with the SPO's Werner Faymann, whom Rinner (declining "charismatic") described as a more appealing personality. The conservative Mayor of Graz, Siegfried Nagl, acknowledged that the OVP has yet to overcome tensions between state-level and federal-level party organizations, which also damaged the party.

¶3. (C) Asked about campaign themes, Rinner noted that personality played an increasing role in Austrian elections. While at first glance that would seem to be a disadvantage for the OVP this year, Rinner thought the party could score with a message that emphasized Molterer's credibility and reliability. Indeed, "promises kept" is the main theme of OVP election ads -- contrasting that with the stream of populist proposals coming from the SPO and Faymann's apparent alliance with the editor of the mass-circulation populist daily "Kronenzeitung." And at the end of the day, Rinner said, "the principle of hope still applies."

¶4. (C) The election rally was held in a small hall; Rinner said the choice was deliberate -- the OVP wanted to be sure of a crowded venue for the cameras. As it was, the hall was over-crowded, under-cooled, and under-provisioned with chairs. The crowd cheered for arriving party dignitaries and gave Molterer on his arrival sustained applause. Molterer delivered his almost hour-long speech with abnormal vigor and enthusiasm, drawing frequent cheers. He outlined various OVP proposals, always returning to the themes of reliability and trust. However, Emboff noticed many attendees whose

enthusiasm for the candidate was well-contained and comments by attendees afterwards tended toward "fine" and "okay." In the course of his speech, Molterer described the OVP as facing the choice of winning or going into opposition. Rinner had previously suggested that a period in opposition could be good for the party. However, those attendees Emboff spoke with afterwards seemed to prefer second place in government to first place among the opposition parties.

#### Styrian Social Democrats Optimistic

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15. (C) Styrian SPO party manager Anton Vukan was, in contrast to Rinner, delighted with the energy and enthusiasm of his party cadres. He ascribed the SPO's unity of purpose to one thing: replacing Chancellor Gusenbauer with Faymann. Gusenbauer, an intellectual, had never managed to win the loyalty of the party faithful. Faymann, in contrast, had real appeal within and beyond the party. Vukan described the party's shift to favoring referenda on future EU treaties as a necessary step closer to public views, as a secondary factor in improving its chances in the election. Vukan himself also serves as a small town mayor, and from his contacts with voters and his colleagues in other towns, he was quite optimistic. He predicted, in contrast to current polls, that the SPO nationally could come close to the 34% share of the vote it took in 2006.

#### The Odder End

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16. (U) As it happened, an OVP-breakaway conservative populist

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Fritz Dinkhauser, chose to schedule a campaign rally at 2:00 in the afternoon in one of Graz's town squares. Emboff observed the rally from a sidewalk table at a nearby restaurant. While polls have shown Dinkhauser and his list approaching the 4% hurdle necessary to win seats in parliament, the rally suggested Dinkhauser is struggling in Graz. Fewer than 30 citizens turned up to attend the rally; they were outnumbered by the 30-40 persons (including sound technicians and a hired band) who accompanied Dinkhauser to the event. Neither OVP nor SPO contacts gave him a chance of entering parliament.  
Girard-diCarlo